

18 April 2009 00:03 UK

## Pancreatic cancer therapy 'hope'

Pancreatic cancer often goes undetected

Promising early results for a drug for pancreatic cancer have been reported by a team of UK and US scientists.

The drug, which targets a molecule called PKD involved in tumour growth, also seemed effective in animal tests on lung cancer, the researchers said.

The findings are especially encouraging because there are few treatments available and survival is poor.

Human trials should start within 18 months, the American Association for Cancer Research conference was told.

This would mean it offers a double action treatment but this needs to be proved through further work

Dr Sushovan Guha, researcher

PKD is a family of molecules called kinases which provide a signalling function between the outside and inside of the cell.

Also involved in cell survival and the formation of new blood vessels, PKD was discovered to be potentially key target in tumours by UK researchers some years ago.

A team at Cancer Research Technology Ltd - a company owned by Cancer Research UK - then developed molecules which would inhibit the effects of PKD.

The latest results on the resulting drug, known as CRT0066101, show it inhibits the growth of pancreatic tumours in mice and works in lung cancer models.

It is thought that future studies may show the drug to be effective on a wider range of cancers.

Human trials should be starting after safety studies have been completed, they researchers said.

'Unmet need'

CRT's discovery laboratories director Dr Hamish Ryder said the team focused on pancreatic and lung cancer tumours because they are cancers with a "significant unmet medical need".

Dr Sushovan Guha, who leads the laboratory at MD Anderson Cancer Center and collaborated in the project, added he was optimistic about the drug's potential.

In addition to killing cancer cells, it is hoped the drug will stop tumours growing and spreading by blocking blood vessel growth.

"This would mean it offers a double action treatment but this needs to be proved through further work."

Sue Ballard, the founder of Pancreatic Cancer UK, said the disease caused 5% of cancer deaths but only received 1% of disease funding.

"There is a great lack of really effective treatments, surgery gives the best chance if done early but even in that situation it can recur or spread.

"This research is in the very early stages but anything that's starting to show promising results is vitally needed